Citizens organizing for social change

There are no jobs and no affordable housing in this neighborhood!

The city is encroaching on prime agricultural land!

We have the stories, the skills, and the determination to make a living from the land we were once forced to leave. Let's organize to make it economically viable!

Our identity is threatened. What can we do to help our people heal and reaffirm our culture in Canadian cities?[1]

Introduction

A problem, a crisis, a vision, an opportunity, or a combination of reasons brings people together to shape change. In this thematic paper we look at the stories of citizen organizing in 11 case studies from Canada and the United States and ask: Why did they organize? How? And how did citizen-organizing evolve over time, building momentum through coalition building and partnerships so that an "ecosystem" of players pushed for systemic change?

In all these cases, different strategies are used at different phases of a pathway towards change[2]. Sometimes, organizing is internally driven by local leadership, and sometimes the stimulus may come from an outside "organizer" with more substantial resources. To sustain the passion and intensity of a movement while protecting against burn-out is a constant tension; and the resources to support organizing work are unpredictable. The changes in rhythm and flow may be adaptive or they may be planned strategies.

[1] Statements inferred from the cases, not direct quotes.

[2] See the Thematic Paper: *Pathways and Levers for systemic change in this series*

Why organize?

By following this changing rhythm, we can identify four reasons for organizing where citizen-organizing, motivated by a shared issue of concern, combines with a particular strategy.

The first is citizen-organizing **as a strategy for protest and advocacy** associated with systematic capacity building for action. *The Greater Edmonton Alliance*, for example, tackling poverty and inequality in the midst of affluence, adopted the model of organizing associated with Saul Alinsky's community organizing work in the United States. This involved the use of "relationals" to bring people into conversation with one another to identify, analyze and strategize to take action on issues of concern. Church social action networks, labour unions and inner city neighborhood organizations identified those who had large informal social networks and could bring in the support of other organizations, resulting in an exponential growth of activists and supporters. The issue of affordable housing was taken on first and since "action is to the organization as oxygen is to the body",[3] this action fuelled more ambitious goals for

[3] Attributed to the Industrial Areas Foundation in Lange, B. (forthcoming) The Greater Edmonton Alliance faces Big Land and Big Oil.

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social enterprise and then against "Big Land and Big Oil", the roadblocks to a more sustainable economy. Protest and advocacy related to unaffordable housing and economic neglect were also the starting points for *People United for Sustainable Housing* (PUSH) in Buffalo. House-to-house mobilizing and community meetings led to organized citizen action to pressure the government to take over vacant land lots so that they could be dedicated to community facilities such as a park, a community centre, and apprenticeship programs for retrofitting derelict housing with energy efficient features, simultaneously calling the utility company to account for its electricity rates. Protest against poverty and the recklessness of the coal industry in rural Ohio also drew upon these citizen-organizing tactics in the 1980s.

A second motivation for citizen-organizing is **self-determination**, the reclaiming of community identity among people whose culture has been marginalized. In the case of the *Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres* (OFIFC), an urgent response was needed to address the alienation of First Nations people as they moved off reserves into urban areas and to the fracturing of their culture by the colonial experience. The Friendship Centres have been physical and cultural spaces where people can reaffirm their cultural identity, find support from fellow Aboriginals, continue their healing journey, and then assert themselves and their identity in Canadian society as a whole. In the Inuit case *(A Quiet Movement*), the commonly-held assumption that the Inuit are good at "adapting" is challenged. While the recent formation of the territory of Nunavut (in 1999) means that Inuit have an opportunity for greater control over decision-making that affects their lives, achieving consensus across a vast territory of relatively isolated communities is a major challenge that has only recently been aided by new media. Impacted disproportionately by climate change, some have organized to affirm, in Sheila Watt-Cloutier's words "the right to be cold"[4]; while others try to find common cause in development that can honour culture while enabling a sustainable economy and provide a meaningful future for young people.

In North Carolina, Ammie Jenkins and the *Sandhills Family Heritage Association* have helped African American families organize to reclaim their cultural heritage. Forced to migrate to the cities during the "Jim Crow" period of legislated racial segregation, these families returned to restore landownership and small-scale agriculture and to re-establish themselves in a rural land-based economy. The organizing principle here was mutual solidarity in economic and social life as they researched and reclaimed their connection to the land, and asserted their right to defend it against encroachment by the Fort Bragg military base.

A third motivation for citizen-organizing is for the purpose of **community-building and civic engagement**. Invoking de Tocqueville's argument that associations are "schools for democracy", community building occurs through the strengthening of associational life and the consequent enrichment of trust, social togetherness, civic action and participation (Barber, 1984, Putnam, 2000). The approach takes as its starting point the existing associational base and the community assets that can be mobilized through those associations for a community purpose. It is through these actions that links between citizens are strengthened, making it easier to self-mobilize to achieve more strategic goals, whether social, political, or economic. An example in this collection of such community building is *Vivre St. Michel en Sante* (VSMS) in a suburb of Montreal where new immigrants from different cultures came together to address issues of common concern: transiency, poverty and crime. A series of roundtables resulted in actions to promote local revitalization, and this built the cohesion necessary for citizen action to protect their new identity: "Collaboration when possible, confrontation when necessary."

The story of *Rural Action* is another example of community building and civic engagement. In its early period it generated ideas and action for rural revitalization through an asset-based community development approach, building a community vision while identifying strengths, assets and shared history. At the same time, it built a membership base that linked people from diverse backgrounds, especially through church affiliation – a "congregational" style of organizing. More recently these ideas have folded into a systematic strategy for sustained wealth creation, focusing on sustainable agriculture, forestry, watershed restoration, environmental education, recycling and waste management. The solid membership base of the organization spreads and reinforces these ideas across the region and provides the capacity to forge coalitions and partnerships that pioneer and sustain a new economy.

The culturally diverse and historically neglected Diamond neighbourhoods of San Diego (*The Village at Market Creek*) is another example of building community, in this case with the assistance of an organizer hired by a funder to circulate through the community and begin looking for ways to "catalyze community change from within".[5] A team of community residents were enlisted to survey their neighbours to determine the community's priorities. Over 800 interviews were conducted, in four languages, and the information gathered became the basis for community discussions and a community vision for The Village at Market Creek. In this

[4] Watt-Cloutier, Sheila (March 2015).*The right to be cold: One woman's story of protecting her culture, the Arctic, and the whole planet*. Allen Lane Canada.

[5] J. Vanica, cited in Dewar, T. (forthcoming). *The Village at Market Creek*

way, the diverse assets of the community were harnessed into a vibrant economic venture, owned and managed by multi-ethnic low income community members themselves.

This example of ownership by low income shareholders illustrates a fourth motivation for citizen-organizing: **to pioneer a new economic model**. Pioneering a social economy in the case of New Dawn Enterprises in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia or the conservation economy in the case of *Ecotrust Canada* in British Columbia are additional examples. The *New Dawn Enterprises* case is an early example of organizing by a social entrepreneur to create awareness of new ways of promoting "an economy that serves society rather than the other way around". With historical roots in the cooperative movement, and responding to the loss of the single industry employer in the area, New Dawn tapped into innovative funding mechanisms for local investment in, and ownership of, enterprises that provided affordable housing, care for the elderly, and training for care workers. The organizing was done by people involved in social enterprises, steadily broadening networks with government and private sector partners as the enterprises forged the linkages required for a social economy to flourish.

Similarly, in British Columbia, citizens are organizing around social enterprises. In this case, the emphasis is on a triple bottom line or conservation economy, demonstrating the viability of small enterprises that are socially equitable, economically sound and environmentally sustainable. Like the *Rural Action, Deep South Wealth Creation Network, Sandhills Family Heritage Association*, and *New Dawn Enterprises* examples, these illustrate localized innovations or "mass localism" at its best.

All of these cases have grown organically from small local beginnings to a complex network of coalitions that enable local ideas to have traction at systemic levels. The art of coalition building, partnering with private and public sectors to create a regulatory environment that embeds mutualism, solidarity and equity together with market opportunities for local products and services is how citizen-led organizing evolved into multi-stakeholder "co-creation". The theme of coalition building and multi-stakeholder partnerships is elaborated in a separate thematic paper.

Challenges and opportunities

Many examples of civil society organizations that mediate between the citizens they serve or represent and other stakeholders, such as the private or public sector, are found in these case studies. However, without continued foundational work to stay connected at the base, some organizations may move ahead with an agenda that is fundable rather than the next step in a truly organic process. Citizen organizing may also come dangerously close to off-loading state responsibilities, hinted at in *VSMS* case, rather than finding innovative ways to partner with the state.

On the other hand, as original purposes for organizing merge with others, the initiatives featured in these cases have the potential to lead the way to organizing for a new economy and a new idea of the "public good". As these cases show, building multiple forms of wealth is required for a sustainable new economy. These include the stocks of social and intellectual capital built into relationships that arise through organizing for change, linking new ideas with the institutional capacity to bring them to fruition, in cultural and environmental assets, and in ownership and control of financial and other assets needed to build sustainable livelihoods. As these local organizing initiatives connect and learn from each other the articulation of a new type of economy becomes clearer.

Associated with the idea of a new economy is the premise that citizens have a role in helping to create a common or public good beyond the immediate responsibilities to community or neighbourhood, and beyond the responsibilities of the state. With this understanding, citizens organizing for a new economy will help to shape all types of institutions and associations so that they assume responsibility for the larger public goods that are reflected in multiple forms of wealth.

The challenge and the opportunity is that there is no one answer when it comes to citizen-driven change. The path is iterative, organic, complex, and dynamic. Luckily the starting point is relatively simple: coming together for a common cause.

Alison Mathie and Nanci Lee

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Questions for discussion:

1. Consider your own experience of citizens organizing for change. What was the motivation to organize? What was the role of citizens? What was the role of civil society organizations? Did the approach to organizing change over time?
2. What kind of leadership is necessary for the different approaches to citizen-organizing described in this paper?

This thematic paper is one in a set of five: *Using local assets to build wealth; Citizens organizing for social change; Leadership styles, Developing partnerships, understanding power and securing identity;* and *Pathways and levers for systems change.*

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Using local assets to build wealth

> You start thinking that there must be something else, another way of doing things – a big idea. So you talk to people and before long, you find out there is another way but it takes awhile to see it, even longer to describe it, then time to develop it, longer still to learn more about it and get some support and expertise, and then even though you're not completely ready, you have to step out and take action.
>
> Alabama farmer
> *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network*

Introduction

There is a growing hunger in both Canada and the United States for broad public conversations on how to create new kinds of economies that are rooted in the assets and needs of communities (Bernard, 2010). People across the political spectrum are wondering what kinds of activities citizen groups should be undertaking for their members and their communities with and without support from governments. Further, development practitioners are asking what kinds of activities citizen groups should be initiating and what types of investments and partnerships with governments and the private sector they should explore (Boshara and Sherraden, 2004). Communities and governments seek new approaches to socio-economic development that sustain communities and encourage citizens; however, they are often unsure of how to proceed.

In each of the 11 cases examined, organizations and groups explore innovative ideas and practices to address these complex challenges. They strive to fill in the spaces and gaps of the social and economic fabric that the market and state do not cover and in so doing, encourage citizens to utilize local assets, develop self-sufficiency, establish sustainability models and build local agency. Most often, these spaces are in the margins where there is too little profit (at least initially) for private entrepreneurs and the context is too challenging or contested for direct government involvement. Further, many of those profiled in the cases understand that the transformation of a community requires its citizens to see themselves and their context differently. As noted in the *New Dawn Enterprises* case, people need to "change the stories they tell themselves about who they are and what they are capable of". Citizens seek to develop a new model of economic development where the assets they already possess are recognized and the wealth they create can be secured.

Recognizing the value of local assets and building agency

> There's a whole bunch of interesting activity that goes on that never gets noticed. I think one of the things that New Dawn has been really good at is noticing these things, acknowledging them, calling them together, and saying, "There are a lot of assets here and we could do better things as we build on strengths".
>
> Board Member
> *New Dawn Enterprises*

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In the *Rural Action* case in Ohio, the *Sandhills Family Heritage Association* case in North Carolina and *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network* case in Mississippi and Alabama, the organizations profiled have a long history of working in community development and possess rich traditions of civic engagement and action. However, like others doing similar work elsewhere in the United States and Canada, these organizations felt that rural communities needed to do economic development differently to deal with challenging circumstances. They watched as young people moved away, outside interests took control of local assets (e.g., agricultural land, businesses) and citizens became less-engaged and more pessimistic.

Against this backdrop, the people and organizations involved in these cases understood that one of the key elements needed for creating sustainable livelihoods for citizens was to keep wealth rooted in local communities rather than to have it disappear into outside pockets. They wanted a different development model – one that recognized and used community assets to build wealth that sticks locally and helps build the self-reliance and self-esteem of citizens. The model would be characterized by several features including: recognizing the value and skills of all community members, orienting people towards narratives and strategies that help them perceive and achieve control over their livelihoods, and requiring the protection of assets and livelihoods. If people could use and protect what they had to get what they need, they would feel engaged and thus, more likely remain in their community and help build its wealth.

Broadening the definition of wealth

> Wealth sticks with you, your family and your community. It's like the soil on this farm - always there, deep and rich. If you feed it, stuff grows and everyone benefits. But income, well it just slips away, you can't hold it no matter how much you make. It's like the dust on that road – blowin' away in the wind. You run after it, trying to stuff it in your pockets, knowing you'll never catch it or get enough but you think you can (laughter). If you approach your work this way, you can spend your entire life making an income and retire with no wealth at all.
>
> Alabama Farmer
> *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network*

The wealth approach, employed in the cases mentioned previously and also alluded to in the asset and conservation language of several other cases, identifies multiple forms of community wealth or capital including: cultural, social, individual, natural, built, financial and political capital (Yellow Wood, 2010). Several of these forms of wealth are tangible (financial, built, and natural) while others carry less tangible attributes (social, political, cultural, and individual capital). However, all can be measured in terms of outcomes, rather than only activities, and it is expected that a community can build each form of wealth without harming the others (e.g., increasing built wealth without sacrificing natural wealth).

By broadening the traditional definitions of wealth to include forms of wealth that benefit individuals and communities (e.g., well-being, political collaboration, shared communication), the citizens involved in *Rural Action, Sandhills Family Heritage Association* and *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network* have developed wealth creation models that are more inclusive and sustainable than traditional community development models. Traditional models tend to focus solely on economic and financial outputs while often ignoring social, political, cultural, natural and individual wealth. The partners in *Rural Action, Sandhills Family Heritage Association* and *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network* include all of these forms of wealth while also considering the financial and built capital evident in their communities. They support a new economy where multiple forms of wealth (e.g. social, individual, natural, built, financial, political, and cultural capital) are recognized.

A primary concept used in building wealth in these cases is the value chain, which is the term used to refer to the supply chain that comprises all of the activities involved in bringing a product or service from conception to production to consumption in a sustainable and local manner[1]. The value chain expands the meaning of *value* beyond money and products to include the broader personal and community values, traditions, relationships, and values of all those who participate. The goal of the value chain is to retain and add value locally rather than have assets extracted, removed from the community and their value added distantly.

This emphasis on building long-term investment for local partners rather than only generating short-term income for distant corporations is also evident in the *Greater Edmonton Alliance, Ecotrust Canada*, as well as the Inuit case (*A Quiet Movement*). These cases tell the story of how local people sought a new economic model that carried aspirations of balance, responsibility, and right to livelihood. Echoing the broader concept of wealth as found in North Carolina, Mississippi and Alabama, these Canadian cases use the language of the "conservation economy", linking

[1] See Yellow Wood Associates (2010) for an overview of value chains and the wealth creation approach.

business opportunities in the agricultural, fisheries and forestry areas with the imperative of environmental stewardship and the promotion of social equity (e.g., the "triple bottom line" or "triple E" enterprises promoted by *Ecotrust Canada* in British Columbia). However, maintaining this conservation emphasis often required strong advocacy against powerful interests. For instance, in the case of the *Greater Edmonton Alliance*, the encroachment of Edmonton's urban development backed by the financial wealth earned fromlarge oil and land development companies generated the impetus for citizen action against political decisions and policies that favoured local developers, global land speculators and the global oil industry over the local public good and environmental consciousness. In this context, housing became more expensive, local food production diminished and agricultural land was plowed under for development. *The Greater Edmonton Alliance*, and the work of its members, helped bring about policy changes that resulted in the protection of prime agricultural land from development, the promotion of a local food system that helped local producers to reclaim market share, and the development of affordable housing. As with *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network* and *Rural Partners*, the goal in Edmonton was to retain community assets and add value locally rather than have these assets extracted and their value removed from the community.

Using assets to change narratives

> For them [rural Appalachian people], these were not junk piles, they were resource piles. Many of them were tinkers. There was value built into the culture in transforming "junk" into something useful.
>
> Interviewee commenting on *ReUse Industries*, a repair and reuse program started in the 1990s
> *Rural Action*

The case studies show how innovations, led by citizens, are helping to answer the vexing question of how ordinary people can reverse or mitigate the trends of economic inequality and wealth depletion. Further, the ideas and actions in these cases are not from institutions disconnected from citizens, but from citizens connecting with institutions and finding a voice – a new narrative. They speak of possibilities that can derive from the recognition and use of local assets and of an emergent demand for a sustainable future.

This use of assets to change narratives is evident in *Rural Action* where local people started a repair and reuse program that promoted innovative recycling ideas. Their message was that waste could be seen as an asset and diverted from landfills and re-purposed as a resource that could create employment and build wealth – in effect creating a circular economy. They partnered with local organizations and universities to design and develop numerous "trash" innovations including: the secondary processing of plastic into pellets; and the use of recyclables in cottage art and craft industries. Such creative thinking is also evident in the example of *People United for Sustainable Housing* (PUSH) in Buffalo, where young activists, going door-to-door to find out local citizen concerns, recognized the potential in vacant and dilapidated housing. Not only could such housing be refurbished and retrofitted for green energy, but by offering unemployed youth the opportunity to apprentice in such refurbishing schemes, a new cadre of skilled workers for the green economy could be created, and campaigns launched to secure fairer rates from utility companies.

On the east coast of Canada where economic challenges are often experienced more acutely than in the rest of the country, the story of *New Dawn Enterprises* in Cape Breton Nova Scotia is both inspiring and instructional; especially as regards the creative use of local (and provincial) assets. *New Dawn Enterprises* took full advantage of provincially-funded policies (financial assets) that invest in community enterprises oriented towards service, affordable housing, care-giving and vocational training. Over three decades, the organization used these financial instruments to develop many of the forms of wealth discussed previously: built and natural capital in their real estate projects; individual and cultural capital in their vocational training programs; political capital in their policy and advocacy work; and social and financial capital in their funding and care-giving networks. Further, and according to many of the *New Dawn Enterprises* board members and staff, they managed to complete these activities by participating in the government financing programs without being directed or controlled by the government. In effect *New Dawn Enterprises* became a community instrument which citizens could employ to utilize government financing programs in a creative fashion to recognize, prioritize, utilize and retain community assets and build the wealth of the region.

The work of *New Dawn Enterprises* also demonstrates the multiplier effect of combining local assets with regional/provincial/state funding so that local wealth and investment can grow more vibrantly. One noticeable result of this work is a more hopeful narrative. People realize that if they use the assets found in local communities, the potential contributions of rural communities to the overall wealth of citizens in the region can be significant.

Summary

> I realize that we're just getting started [and] we don't have a lot of big numbers to give you or examples of how we've built all sorts of wealth and made big sums of money...but we're putting down deep roots in land… [and] in communities that have sat idle for far too long...in land that we possess and communities in which we live but we see as having no value.... But now, because of this [Network] we are nourishing our soil, our souls and our communities. We are building a future for our families, creating wealth from what we already own – our land and our people!
>
> Mississippi farmer
> *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network*

The 11 citizen-led initiatives orient to a new type of economy and retrieve values of sustainability, solidarity, wealth creation, and the recognition and use of local assets. The cases trace how social innovation and wealth creation has grown and spread through citizens acting collaboratively. In so doing, these citizens claim the space for social and economic inclusion while at the same time often challenging the status quo and the nature of an economy that drives growth at the expense of inclusion and environmental sustainability.

Phil Davison

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Questions for discussion

1. From your reading of the cases, how does the focus on using local assets help change how people view themselves and their communities?
2. What do the case studies tell us about the multiple forms of wealth and how people relate to a broader concept of wealth?

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Citizen-led innovation for a new economy

Pathways and levers for systemic change

> . . .[S]ystemic change must be both bottom-up and top-down—driven by communities, businesses, and citizens deciding on their own to build the future locally as well as to develop the political muscle to adopt systems-changing policies at the national and international levels. . . . A powerful citizens' movement is a necessary spur to action at all levels.
>
> *James Gustave Speth* (2014, p. 7)

The case studies in this collection speak about citizens confronting dysfunctional economic systems by putting ideas for alternative economic systems into practice. These citizens question the sustainability of economic growth if it is achieved at the expense of the environment, local food security, and meaningful employment. They want to mitigate the destructive boom and bust cycles induced by their dependence on the global economy. They champion the value of multiple forms of wealth, all of which need to be built and sustained for long-term survival and prosperity.

But how do their strategies combine to achieve systemic change? This paper highlights what we have learned about citizens organizing around innovation, building coalitions, and bridging institutional and cultural dividing lines. Each case has a different pathway, a different sequencing of strategies, a different set of constraints to overcome and a different time frame in which it has been able to contribute to systems change. As you read through this discussion paper, think about your own experience of locally initiated change that has become part of a larger movement. What are the different strategies? How are they interconnected? What are the starting points and what are the steps that follow?

Pathways

Let's examine the case of *Rural Action* as an example. In South East Ohio, the coal industry in Central Appalachia had left environmental destruction and the poverty in its wake. Citizen-organizing in the 1970s and 1980s achieved some success in terms of calling public attention to the consequences of collusion between the coal mining companies and local government. But the focus of civic action was on what the movement was *against* rather than what it was *for*. Evolving into a member-based organization in 1991, *Rural Action* deliberately worked closely with local communities to imagine what rural revitalization could look like. It began to promote local food production systems, sustainable forestry, watershed restoration, environmental education, waste management, and advocacy on local energy issues. Through this work, *Rural Action* became a central node in a regional network of local initiatives that are now linking producers and consumers, including major institutions in the area. It has tapped into government volunteer programs and inspired a new generation of activists. As these activities have intensified, so has the leverage at the policy level to strengthen this change even further. A sustainable economic system is growing steadily, even in the face of the current shale gas extraction boom.

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As this example illustrates, multiple forms of wealth need to be strengthened for a sustainable system to grow. The pathway towards systemic change began with community action to address poverty and environmental degradation. Then, focusing on rural economic development, small initiatives grew through building networks among agricultural and forestry producers and consumer groups. Eventually, institutions such as the university, the schools, and local restaurants were linked. At the same time, *Rural Action* fuelled political pressure to introduce waste reduction systems and raise the level of debate about shale gas extraction. In other words, the pathway wound through periods of political activism, community organizing, economic activity, coalition building for economic solidarity, and action at the political level to achieve policy change. Over time, the attitudinal shift necessary for a paradigm shift began to emerge.

Different citizen-led innovations follow different pathways to systemic change, but in each case it is possible to identify levers. As the term suggests, the weight of existing systems can be lifted by such levers, and innovation is given room to grow.

Levers

Proponents of systems change (e.g., Meadows, 2008; McKibben, 2008) agree that a fundamental shift in culture lies at its root. If economic institutions are to change, a cultural change in what is valued for social well-being and life satisfaction has to take place. Yet such shifts come about not with one magic bullet, but with a multiplication of mutually reinforcing strategies and policies. As Meadows (2008), emphasizes, one single lever—"a small change in one thing that can produce changes in everything"—does not exist. Changing the amount of land set aside for conservation, or the minimum wage, or the rent charged in subsidized housing is: "diddling with the details, arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Probably 90—no 95—no 99 percent of our attention goes to [these kinds of] parameters, but there's not a lot of leverage in them" (Meadows, 2008, p. 148). Instead, systems change that transforms the status quo for a sustainable and equitable economy, for example, is achieved through multiple levers.

Meadows' (2008) discussion of multiple levers for systems change provides a guide for identifying leverage in all of the cases. She notes that leverage is particularly effective in parts of the system where information and control are found, when information feedback loops to decision-makers result either in corrective action (if the feedback is negative), or in reinforcement (if the feedback is positive). The visibility of growing urban and youth unemployment in Buffalo (*People United for Sustainable Housing*), popular protest against urban-industrial encroachment on viable agricultural land in Edmonton (*Greater Edmonton Alliance*), or the social and political consequences of a loss of cultural identity among Aboriginal people in Ontario (*Ontario Federation of Friendship Centres*) are examples of negative feedback that acted as a lever. In the San Diego case (*The Village at Market Creek*), a major philanthropist realized that existing patterns of donor giving were not making a difference; the loss of jobs, the persistence of poverty and low-grade housing that had blighted the "hollowed-out" areas of formerly thriving industrial areas of the Diamond neighbourhoods did not respond to traditional giving. This negative feedback raised the possibility that local ownership by community members was required for a viable and sustainable solution. In British Columbia, the overwhelming evidence of climate change and its connection to the mainstream economy gave *Ecotrust Canada*'s work increased credibility. *Ecotrust* was able to leverage this when introducing viable strategies for building a conservation economy.

Democracy is a system designed to generate the negative feedback loops that will put people out of office if self-correction does not occur. But as Meadows (1999) explains: "The process depends upon the free, full, unbiased flow of information back and forth between electorate and leaders. [Instead, however], billions of dollars are spent by [political] leaders to limit and bias that flow" (p. 10). The cases in this collection are examples of citizens attempting to correct that bias. The *Greater Edmonton Alliance* case study drew attention to "organized money" trying to corrupt civic politics, especially the power of Big Oil skewing municipal, provincial and federal politics towards encouraging oil interests and land speculation at the expense of democratic participation. A traceability tool developed by *Ecotrust Canada* entitled This Fish allows consumers to purchase only fish caught by hook and line, creating a feedback loop in the market that could potentially influence the seafood industry's choice of fishing methods. In the *PUSH Buffalo* case, relationships of distrust between the residents of Buffalo's West Side and the municipal government meant the community had little leverage. In a mediating role, *PUSH* gained legitimacy in the community by taking time to listen to people's concerns. By highlighting the interconnected issues of environmental quality, equity, and economic security, *PUSH* devised strategies to challenge existing power blocs and influence municipal decisions about youth employment, affordable housing and energy efficiency.

Another powerful leverage point is where feedback loops that only reward winners can be weakened. In the prevailing economic system, tax policies favouring the wealthy can be weakened if public opinion is mobilized to make the political case for progressive taxation on income, or taxation to cover the real costs of pollution or carbon emissions, or increases in corporate tax. The direct payment of royalties

from shale gas extraction to municipalities where the impact is greatest, rather than to state or federal jurisdictions, is an example from the *Rural Action* case. The San Diego case provides the example of an innovative financing mechanism allowing low-income residents to be co-owners of *The Village at Market Creek* through a community development Initial Public Offering (CD-IPO) but preventing large scale share accumulation by a few.

Yet another lever is using underutilized regulations or government programs, as well as claiming the space to shape new laws and policies. For example, citizen-organizing in rural Appalachia was effective in convincing local authorities to use their power to compel coal companies to comply with regulations, and then to protect and compensate farmers for loss of land quality. More recently, citizens are shaping regional agricultural policy as well as state legislation for channeling shale gas royalties to local municipalities. *PUSH Buffalo*'s strategy to get municipal support for its green retrofitting strategies for affordable housing under the Green Jobs – Green New York Act of 2009 is another example. By its creative use of provincial government sponsored Community Economic Development Investment Funds to build social enterprises, *New Dawn Enterprises* in Cape Breton illustrates this further; the social services and the training of care workers now serve as a model for provincial policy.

All these levers help to redistribute ownership, control, and production of livelihood to local levels. They also, in the process, build awareness where it is most needed in order to change the system or create an alternative to it. This awareness may then be used "to add, change, evolve or self-organize system structure" (Meadows, 1999, p. 3), a powerful leverage point. Meadows explains, "The ability to self-organize is the strongest form of system resilience. A system that can evolve can survive almost any change, by changing itself" (Ibid., p. 15). Taking this further is Jane Jacobs advice that we learn from ecology about how we should improve our economic systems, particularly their ability to *self-organize, correct, and self-refuel* (Jacobs, 2000).

Each of these cases illustrates the transitions not only in how citizens organize themselves (informally in associations, as membership-based organizations, or as formal non-profits), but also in how they collaborate with others to build networks, often in ways that create alternative systems. The effort that goes into this is often under-appreciated, but when successful, new interdependent local economic relationships are created through value chains that build multiple forms of wealth. Both the *Deep South Wealth Creation Network* and *Rural Action* cases demonstrate a network of allies evolving and permeating the mainstream economy. Another example is *Ecotrust Canada*'s work in the conservation economy, forming strategic alliances with communities on the coast where the model of industrial resource development was being challenged by local groups and First Nations. Social innovations in how people communicate, collaborate and organize accompany technical innovation (such as digital mapping for community planning and visioning), social financing mechanisms used to support innovative enterprise, and "proof of concept" measures used to test the synergy of these innovations.

The ability to self-organize and create or evolve new systems relies on a diversity of sources of ideas. As Meadows (1999) observes, "Insistence on a single culture shuts down learning, cuts back resilience" (p. 16). The cases of the *Sandhills Family Heritage Association*, *Deep South Wealth Creation Network*, and the *Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres* highlight the importance of retrieving lost culture, celebrating diversity, and learning from indigenous ways of knowing. These feed the imagination for new ways of living.

Finally, the lever that meets with the most resistance is the one that pulls on the consciousness and behavioral changes that are necessary for systems change. When it is possible to call into question the paradigm from which the current system draws its central goals, power structure, rules and culture, there is openness to alternative possibilities and a paradigm shift can be considered. The actions outlined in many of the cases reflect a deep questioning of the economic model that sees nature as "a stock of resources to be converted to human purpose" (Meadows, 1999, p. 17) or "economic growth as the answer to virtually all problems" (p. 1). Whether this is influenced by indigenous ways of knowing, or the idea of multiple forms of wealth and sustainable livelihoods, or simply a growing awareness of the imperative to shift to a low carbon economy, the ground is shifting. A reconnection with place, and drawing livelihood from the land, is part of this shift as in the *Sandhills* and *Deep South* cases. So are the ideas for "distributed systems of production" where local nodes of food and energy production are connected through increasingly sophisticated communications networks (Murray, 2009). Deeper democratic engagement is evident in the community building work among new immigrants in Montreal (*Vivre St.Michel en Sante*), in the *Greater Edmonton Alliance* case of broad-based citizen mobilization, and in the securing of fair treatment by city and utility companies in the *PUSH Buffalo* case. The paradigm shift, then, is a new way of seeing, an articulation of a new type of economy expressed by new producers and consumers committed to environmentally sustainable and socially just practices.

Alison Mathie

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Questions for discussion:

1. Think of an example of "Citizen-Led Innovation for Sustainable Change" from your own experience. Draw a time-line of how it evolved from local origins to influencing systemic change.
2. Around the time-line, illustrate the pathways and significant events and levers used to bring it to where it is now.
3. What are the prospects for these actions for change? In an ideal, but realistic scenario, what will have changed 20 or 30 years from now?

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Leadership styles

> I'd say, if you were working with an organization and there's a choice between the goal of that organization, or the particular program they're working on, and educating people, developing people, helping them grow, helping them become able to analyze – if there's a choice, we'd sacrifice the goal of the organization for helping the people grow, because we think in the long run it's a bigger contribution…
> (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 116).

Introduction

The merits of an idea, a program, a policy, a system are crucial to the effectiveness of citizen-led initiatives, but without leadership these virtues will rarely be sustainable. The commitment that leaders give to establish personal relationships, build trust, mentor others, speak up, and be tenacious emerges as one of the key markers of whether citizen-led change will stick.

Leadership that encourages people to organize for change is evident in all of the cases in this project; however, the cases also show that there are many styles of leadership exhibited ranging from inspirational and out-in-front, to understated and dispersed. At times, leaders must speak up for the people in their community and in other instances they have to create the spaces for the community to develop its own voice. Creating this space for community input requires a collaborative, relational, and less directive leadership style. And yet, as the cases demonstrate, there are occasions where a more visible style of leadership is needed - where leaders must challenge the status quo, support initiatives that are unpopular, expose diverse opinions and be the champions for change. Regardless of style, the test of leadership is the ability to connect people and encourage them to develop a shared vision or collaborate to meet opportunity.

Leadership styles and characteristics

> When this project started and we first came together, I noticed that folks took time to listen to each other. There was none of this attitude "You need to do things this way" or "Look, you farmers don't know what you're doing". Instead, people took time to listen and we all had an opportunity to learn from each other….I felt like my experiences and my opinions were valued….I never felt like an outsider….I felt like I was a leader meeting and working with people who wanted to support me.
>
> Alabama Farmer
> *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network*

There are numerous examples of leadership styles in the cases. Consider Ammie Jenkins (the *Sandhills Family Heritage Association*), who was inspired by Martin Luther King but discovered relatively late in life a yearning to reclaim a lost heritage. A visit to her homeplace brought

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about a rediscovery of her ties to the land. Her conversations with others awoke a desire to restore decades of land loss experienced by African Americans in the Sandhills region of North Carolina. What began as a personal quest - leading from behind - evolved into community organizing – leading from out-in-front - and resulted in the launch of a heritage project that necessitated advocacy for land-based economic ventures for African Americans in the region.

In the *New Dawn Enterprises* case, Rankin MacSween's desire to change the predominant narrative of economic dependency found on Cape Breton resulted in innovation and entrepreneurial activity that restored a sense of pride and place among citizens. Rankin initially adopted a more out-in-front, personality-driven approach to leadership since advocacy and charisma were expected and deemed necessary in mobilizing community support; however, as *New Dawn Enterprises* expanded and became more complex and strategically driven, he developed a more relational and distributed approach to leadership as networking became an important part of his work.

Sheila Watt-Cloutier's fight for the right of Inuit people to have a traditional livelihood to ensure their economic well-being and to preserve their way of life (*A Quiet Movement*) required a demonstration of leadership in global as well as local arenas. She realized that her work as a champion for the region would be more effective when done in concert with others both inside and outside the Arctic.

While their styles are different, leaders in the case studies exhibit several common characteristics. They hold the trust of others and are most often from the community rather than outsiders. They are deeply familiar with the power dynamics and contextual realities of the community and have invested extended periods of time listening to people before thinking about organizing or speaking. They realize the need for creative action but are acutely aware that they must resist the pressure to conform. They know that trust is their most important asset and that persistence and sometimes confrontation will be required. They know that developing and maintaining broad-based support for a citizen-led initiative requires them to chart and hold a consistent course even when there is a difference of opinion and discord about what to do. They also understand that, while individual actions are sometimes necessary, sharing leadership responsibilities will deepen and strengthen citizen-led efforts in more profound and sustainable ways.

Sharing leadership

> What feels most right about these teams is that we are the ones doing the work. It is not about being recruited to help others, or agree to an existing agenda. No, that's not it. WE make the agenda, and in carrying it out, we have to think about what we can and will do for ourselves, as individuals and as a group.
>
> Team Leader
> *The Village at Market Creek*

The ability to share leadership and spread the capacity for action outwards so as to keep multiple activities and various groups connected is a key characteristic of many of the leaders in the cases. The advantage of sharing or dispersing leadership is that it allows communities to benefit from a broad range of ideas, to share responsibilities, to make efficient use of resources, to avoid duplication of efforts, and to enable a response to questions and concerns from citizens and communities in a timely and localized manner.

In *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network*, which covers Mississippi and Alabama, the Network used a dispersed leadership structure to enable partners to think strategically about their work, share resources, have greater influence throughout both states and, most importantly, work collaboratively rather than competitively. Participants were able to see the overall picture and understand how their activities and outcomes fit together. Further, the initial funding from the Ford Foundation, which supported their work, came with a caveat that leaders and communities would be expected to sustain the wealth creation network with local and inter-state efforts that would be directed by a dispersed leadership structure. Local leaders understood that while financial support for the work might initially come from external organizations, it was their ability to develop shared leadership that would create sustainable, citizen-led enterprises and maintain community momentum after the funding was gone.

In Western Canada, the *Greater Edmonton Alliance* relied on "relationals" to spread the power of ideas; that is, they made use of existing leadership links or relationals in established church congregations, unions, and other organizations, and combined these leaders and their connections (relationals) into an alliance. Similarly, in the Southern United States, *Rural Partners* and the *Sandhills Family Heritage Association* fostered a dispersed leadership structure by helping people connect their leadership potential with their past achievements and organizational

involvement, giving them a strong voice that resonated with their longstanding civil rights activities. In these cases, the validation of experiential learning and the recognition of historical accomplishments and organizational connections helped empower local citizens and awaken their latent leadership.

Sustaining leadership and maintaining momentum

> It is a slow building process…it's generational work…we are not going to create massive change overnight and we're not going to build an organization like this overnight.
>
> Board member
> *Greater Edmonton Alliance*

Leaders involved in *New Dawn Enterprises*, the *Greater Edmonton Alliance* and *People United for Sustainable Housing* (PUSH) all spoke of the time it took to nurture participation and civic membership, and how important these efforts were to building a sustainable base of support that kept everyone motivated and involved. Leaders working in *Ecotrust Canada, Vivre Saint-Michel en Santé* and *Rural Action* explained that while detailed plans were important, so was a trail-and-error approach; especially as circumstances changed and new strategies for ensuring momentum became evident. Others noted that leadership sometimes had to be confrontational and perhaps even a bit charismatic as in the early days of the *Greater Edmonton Alliance* when leaders employed a step-by-step Alinksky approach to advocacy[1]. And yet, at other times, it was important to lead from alongside, building the collective identity of the organization and encouraging citizen-action. The need for "situational leadership" that could respond to changing circumstances and maintain a distributed leadership structure was essential in attracting new members and maintaining momentum.

Leaders did express concern over how to sustain community building efforts over time and among generations, noting that they had to be careful to ensure that "dreams for change" were framed within the capacity of those involved or else people would grow tired and get lost along the way. They also had to remind everyone, and themselves, that change was not going to occur overnight and that the initial activities of citizen-led change needed to focus on building collective identity, trust, respect, and reciprocity among member organizations. Building a strong base rooted in a learning culture was essential to longevity.

Leadership development and mentoring was also noted as a necessary component for sustaining leadership and maintaining momentum. In *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network*, mentoring and training were built into the funding agreements with the Ford Foundation. Farmers and partners were required to participate in training workshops that explained how the network operated and how value chains could be used to create wealth. Those taking part in the *Greater Edmonton Alliance* were offered workshops in relational listening, power analysis and organizing. These sessions provided space for leaders to grow and to engage in critical reflection of their work. The *Village at Market Creek* established mentoring and a learn-as-you-go culture as key elements to empower and build the capacity of local citizens so that they could undertake further organizing, policy advocacy, and community change work even as leadership changed.

Navigating cultural, racial and gender stereotypes

> We've got to get rid of that [stereotyped] image and not buy what they are selling. We need to continue to uphold our own dignity and speak out what we believe. We need to stick together as a group. We've got to speak up and say, "Here's what you are doing, and here's what we want".
>
> Board Member
> *Sandhills Family Heritage Association*

Leaders involved in *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network* and *Sandhills Family Heritage Association* cases had to speak to and challenge existing cultural and racial stereotypes, while also navigating changing socio-economic contexts. They had to deal with racial divides that left many African American farms underutilized and/or in the hands of large farming corporations. In addition, much of the farming knowledge resided with older African Americans who had few options to pass on their knowledge (or their land) to a younger generation since most youth did not see farming as a viable career, profession, or even hobby. Yet, within this context of languishing rural land and untapped agricultural knowledge, opportunity emerged in the form of an increasing demand from urban areas for local food. The challenge for rural African American communities and leaders was to revive small farms to respond to this emerging market and to encourage a new generation to become involved in farming. This necessi-

[1] See Alinksky, S. D. (1971). *Rules for Radicals: A pragmatic primer for realistic radicals.* New York: Random House.

tated leaders introducing a new approach to rural development that focused on wealth creation rather than only on income generation and in so doing, they challenged decades-old stereotypes regarding African American land ownership and the value of small scale farming.

It is also important to note the ways in which women discussed their leadership roles and the leadership styles they experienced. In *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network*, several of the women noted that the male farmers did not initially respond well to the idea of having women take on a leadership role in some of the training workshops. However, over time, and as the full impact of the value chain approach became evident, most of the farmers realized that such gender bias was unfounded. In the *Greater Edmonton Alliance* case, the shift from a confrontational and charismatic style of leadership that characterized much of its early work, to a leadership stance of leading from alongside and listening more carefully, was described by some leaders as moving away from a patriarchal leadership style to a more relational one. This emerging leadership style emphasizes multiple sector collaborations and intergenerational dialogue to enhance democracy and social solidarity rather than charisma and confrontation.

Summary

> Any of our allies are expected to proceed with kindness, which denotes respect that we have for each other. Coming together in honesty sustains our relationships over time. Sharing what we know and understand supports our positive emotions and inner strengths. Being strong, we can care for each other and conduct any collaborative project in good faith, with respect and trust.
>
> Staff member
> *Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres*

Leadership is always challenging and particularly so when building common cause across social differences over time, and when navigating diverse power relationships in community settings. The examples of leadership shown in the case studies reveal leaders who recognized that self-control, discipline, and the need to listen carefully were essential personal traits for building support among community members, and also in sustaining themselves during challenging times. Their passion for leadership reflects a broad-based loyalty to a community or a region, and a belief in the possibility of a more equitable and sustainable social and economic future. These leaders recognize the potential of using local networks, local people, and local assets to sustain citizen-led efforts.

Phil Davison

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Discussion questions

1. What is your understanding of leadership? What leadership experiences have you been involved with personally?
2. What leadership characteristics inspire you? Why?
3. In your opinion, what is the relationship between trust and leadership in citizen-led activities?

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Developing partnerships, understanding power and securing identity

> It's consistent with the saying that to go fast, you go alone; but to go far, you must go together.
>
> Community Leader
> *The Village at Market Creek*

Introduction

The case narratives offer a clear demonstration of how partnerships with public and private sector institutions were crafted to sustain momentum, take initiatives to scale, and broaden the receptivity to change. Several characteristics are evident. First, citizen-led change cannot usually be done by just one organization or individual. Trusted partners who can help shape and support public interest and action are needed. Efforts that sometimes begin as personal quests evolve into community organizing and lead to collaborations with a broad range of partners. Second, to be effective, partners realize that the change process is rarely linear and that organizations and individuals may work for years to develop support for a common cause – a cause that may shift as circumstances change. In addition, partners working in citizen-led initiatives appreciate that change is most often gradual. They take the long view rather than the short win. Further, they understand the importance of adapting to the requirements of partnership while also remaining true to the ideals that initially brought them together. While compromise might be necessary to build support for change, concessions should not jettison values. Finally, those involved in these efforts understand the negative and positive characteristics of power and learn how to use power to navigate difficult circumstances.

Developing partnerships

> What I've learned is that people will participate in these initiatives…and will take a greater leadership role if their previous experiences are recognized. Unfortunately, we live in and I work in an environment that is deeply socialized to privilege the attitude of "learning equals schooling."… It is a paradigm that virtually excludes any serious consideration of the individual and all of their informal learning. This is a developmental approach that we need to toss out.
>
> Post-secondary partner
> *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network*

The efforts of the members of *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network*, *Rural Action* and the *Sandhills Family Heritage Association* demonstrate a desire to use and build upon the existing learning and deep culture of people in order to establish trust among partners and create broad networks. Examples include recognizing and incorporating prior knowledge and cultural practices, showcasing communi-

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ty achievements and participating in community events, growing and marketing traditional foods, and ensuring that existing organizations that work with local communities are involved in and lead the initiatives. In these cases, like many of the 11 profiled, citizen action coalesces around such shared knowledge and experience. The work starts from what people know and where they live but it doesn't stay there. As conversations and actions continue, long-term goals are identified and an initial informal movement evolves into a formal network where alliances are built and civil society, member-based organizations take form.

Consider for instance how the *Vivre Saint-Michel en Santé* case grew from initial discussions of how to improve a neighbourhood characterized by poverty, transiency and crime into a community mobilizing for civic participation of new immigrants. Similarly, the work of the *Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres* began with government support for First Nations people when they moved from reserves to urban centres and then evolved into a movement and an organization that was able to affirm both the importance of indigenous cultural identity and the ability to adapt to mainstream culture. In North Carolina, Ammie Jenkins began a personal quest to learn about her family history and as she did so, a larger need emerged and a broader movement formed around the shared sense of land and heritage loss among the African-American community in the Sandhills.

Despite investment of time in collaboration, networking, and communication, organizational cultures can be very different, and tensions can arise as partnerships evolve. At times, collaboration can move forward easily and at other times, collaborative efforts can stumble. Further, it can be a challenge for leadership to manage different funding strands and maintain momentum of citizen-led action over time. For instance, *New Dawn Enterprises*' decades-long work began with a few small enterprises and grew to a large non-profit community development corporation that owns and operates businesses that employ more than 175 people throughout the Cape Breton region of northeastern Nova Scotia. This growth did not come without criticism or controversy, but in order to grow and be sustainable, the organization had to evolve to respond to changing government funding arrangements and community needs. In another region of Canada, Sheila Watt-Cloutier's attempts in the Arctic (*A Quiet Movement*) to champion traditional culture and livelihoods by holding the United States responsible for climate change had to be reconciled with the appeal of the new economic opportunities that accompanied these changes for a younger generation.

The cases outline narratives of organizing and struggle, of community based movements that emerged from individual efforts to build trust and motivate citizens and grew into larger initiatives that changed livelihoods. In so doing, the collective power of organization was able to expand the scale and deepen the impact of individual efforts for citizen-led sustainable change.

Understanding power

> We know how to challenge things that need to be challenged, speak up when it's required, and take ideas from the table to the community – make things happen. Taking action is part of our history living in the South.
>
> Mississippi Farmer
> *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network*

The stories that people tell in the 11 cases reveal a great deal about their understanding of power – how it is used, how it expands, how it flows, and also, how it can be hidden. The cases illustrate how power can sustain the momentum of citizen-led innovation and change, and also how it can stifle that momentum. The organizers involved in cases such as the *Greater Edmonton Alliance, People United for Sustainable Housing (PUSH), the Sandhills Family Heritage Association* and *Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres* experienced power in all its manifestations --"power over", "power with", "power to" and "power within". They experienced "power over" in the form of the power of the prevailing system and of vested interests in maintaining the status quo and its institutions (which often led to inaction among those who felt they had no power). Challenging "power over" was the starting point for their work. Focusing on strategies to build the power and confidence of people, they focused on their "power within," the individual, cultural and experiential attributes that people already possessed. As people came to understand their "power within" and the power they had in collaboration with others ("power with"), they developed a sense of agency or "power to" (capacity to take action). Consider the examples that follow.

In the *Greater Edmonton Alliance* case, leadership training was used to help organizers draw upon their "power within" (the alliances and connections that already existed in the community, what they termed as "relationals") to bring people together to fight against powerful urban development interests. In the *PUSH* case, door-to-door canvassing helped build a common cause and develop a voice among local citizens for quality affordable housing and to redevelop empty homes for occupancy by low-income residents. Such community mobilization to face "power over" is also evident in the asset-based community building work in rural Appalachia (*Sandhills Family Heritage Association*). Here a cultural tradition of connecting to the land gave impetus for a rural land-based livelihood, as well as the strength to defend it from a powerful United States military base. Such

"power within" is also evident in the *Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres* case where partners drew upon the strengths of indigenous culture and the solidarity of an urban support system to create a way for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people to adjust to an urban environment. By maintaining their sense of cultural identity and helping to balance or reconcile different world views, the organizers forged power and confidence among its members to participate in Canadian society while earning respect for their distinct Aboriginal cultures.

Many of the cases also show how negotiating power involves tension and compromise. Leaders may struggle to maintain initial goals and not "sell out" as new opportunities for collaboration emerge. For example, *Ecotrust Canada* had to balance its commitment to local initiatives with its desire to invest in activities that could go to scale with the result that several local initiatives had to be abandoned because they did not have that potential. As noted previously, Sheila Watt-Cloutier (*A Quiet Movement*) had to balance differing generational perspectives on economic need, traditional livelihoods, and changing environmental and political situations in the Arctic. In each case and regardless of common goals, partnerships were sometimes jeopardized and it took leadership and resources to navigate power. The theme paper on *Leadership* discusses in detail how leaders worked to navigate these differing perspectives and strived to maintain organizational momentum.

Securing identity

> There's a whole bunch of interesting activity that goes on that never gets noticed. I think one of the things that New Dawn has been really good at is noticing these things, acknowledging them, calling them together, and saying, "There are a lot of assets here and we could do better things as we build on strengths".
>
> Board Member
> *New Dawn Enterprises*

Of key interest in the asset-based literature is whether the benefits of individual and community social capital can be altered through citizen-led initiatives, and if these interventions result in a change in the perception of oneself as a citizen (White et al., 2006). The activities described in the cases are citizen-led and respect the networks, norms of reciprocity and trust, and the traditions that exist in a community. But such initiatives also play a role in challenging these norms and encouraging local action. Thus, while partners may understand their work as "doing development", the programs they develop are most successful when they are done by members of the community. When led by community members, development work fosters a greater sense of possibility and skill recognition among residents (individual capital) while also helping to expose the social and political capital necessary to challenge and change local circumstances (agency). It appears, for example, that members of *The Deep South Wealth Creation Network*, the *Sandhills Family Heritage Association* and *PUSH* changed their attitudes and feelings of self-worth - their identity capital - when they recognized and validated existing assets, which then shaped their behaviour and encouraged their civic interactions – their agency.

The case studies suggest that a person's individual capital or more plainly, a person's feeling of confidence and self-worth, determines how he or she negotiates life passages in daily life, work, and learning, and can determine how he or she acts. The cases illustrate that people with improved self confidence are more likely to challenge power structures and have a future-oriented focus. Often, the result of such improved confidence is a desire to be more active in society which increases a person's desire to learn and encourages their motivation to act (Sherraden et al, 2005).

Summary

> In a nutshell, you keep pointing at the anomalies and failures of the old paradigm; you keep speaking louder and with assurance from the new paradigm in places of public visibility and power. You don't waste time with reactionaries; rather you work with active agents and with the vast middle ground of people who are open-minded (Meadows, 1999, p. 18).

In all of the cases, there is considerable experimentation in developing common cause, building partnerships, and navigating power in order to foster stronger citizen-led roles. The cases offer insight into how and when local voluntary efforts partnered with local non-profits or foundations, how collaborations with government organizations were secured, and how partnerships with the private sector were negotiated. While not always successful, citizen-led initiatives had to be nimble enough to adapt to the requirements of partnership, while holding fast to their own identity.

Partnerships that stood up to challenges over time, and strengthened citizen-led initiatives, included people and organizations who understood how to transform unilateral power into shared power and who viewed power as not only negative (power over, limiting action), but also as a positive (power to, fostering the capacity to act). These partnerships were characterized by people who navigated power by taking the time to listen, making no immediate assumptions about how institutions functioned, how power flowed in the community, what people's passions were or what self-interests might be at play.

Phil Davison

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Questions for discussion

1. From your reading of the case studies, how is community agency/ownership enabled, encouraged and sustained as citizen-led initiatives expand?
2. In your opinion, how should power structures be challenged and navigated as activities expand?
3. How can a culture of learning be fostered in citizen-led activities? Why is this culture important?

This thematic paper is one in a set of five: *Using local assets to build wealth; Citizens organizing for social change; Leadership styles, Developing partnerships, understanding power and securing identity;* and *Pathways and levers for systems change.*

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Citizens organizing for social change

There are no jobs and no affordable housing in this neighborhood!

The city is encroaching on prime agricultural land!

We have the stories, the skills, and the determination to make a living from the land we were once forced to leave. Let's organize to make it economically viable!

Our identity is threatened. What can we do to help our people heal and reaffirm our culture in Canadian cities?[1]

Introduction

A problem, a crisis, a vision, an opportunity, or a combination of reasons brings people together to shape change. In this thematic paper we look at the stories of citizen organizing in 11 case studies from Canada and the United States and ask: Why did they organize? How? And how did citizen-organizing evolve over time, building momentum through coalition building and partnerships so that an "ecosystem" of players pushed for systemic change?

In all these cases, different strategies are used at different phases of a pathway towards change[2]. Sometimes, organizing is internally driven by local leadership, and sometimes the stimulus may come from an outside "organizer" with more substantial resources. To sustain the passion and intensity of a movement while protecting against burn-out is a constant tension; and the resources to support organizing work are unpredictable. The changes in rhythm and flow may be adaptive or they may be planned strategies.

[1] Statements inferred from the cases, not direct quotes.

[2] See the Thematic Paper: *Pathways and Levers for systemic change in this series*

Why organize?

By following this changing rhythm, we can identify four reasons for organizing where citizen-organizing, motivated by a shared issue of concern, combines with a particular strategy.

The first is citizen-organizing **as a strategy for protest and advocacy** associated with systematic capacity building for action. *The Greater Edmonton Alliance*, for example, tackling poverty and inequality in the midst of affluence, adopted the model of organizing associated with Saul Alinsky's community organizing work in the United States. This involved the use of "relationals" to bring people into conversation with one another to identify, analyze and strategize to take action on issues of concern. Church social action networks, labour unions and inner city neighborhood organizations identified those who had large informal social networks and could bring in the support of other organizations, resulting in an exponential growth of activists and supporters. The issue of affordable housing was taken on first and since "action is to the organization as oxygen is to the body",[3] this action fuelled more ambitious goals for

[3] Attributed to the Industrial Areas Foundation in Lange, B. (forthcoming) The Greater Edmonton Alliance faces Big Land and Big Oil.

This paper is one in a set of five discussion papers designed to stimulate discussion in educational settings about the themes emerging from 11 case studies prepared for the forum **Citizen-Led Sustainable Change: Innovations in North American Community Development**. Summaries of these cases accompany this set of thematic papers. Further details about this forum, along with interviews and webinars by case study authors, can be found at www.coady.stfx.ca/coady/nacommdev/. The full case study collection will be published in *Citizen-Led Innovation for a New Economy*, edited by Alison Mathie and John Gaventa (details forthcoming).

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social enterprise and then against "Big Land and Big Oil", the roadblocks to a more sustainable economy. Protest and advocacy related to unaffordable housing and economic neglect were also the starting points for *People United for Sustainable Housing* (PUSH) in Buffalo. House-to-house mobilizing and community meetings led to organized citizen action to pressure the government to take over vacant land lots so that they could be dedicated to community facilities such as a park, a community centre, and apprenticeship programs for retrofitting derelict housing with energy efficient features, simultaneously calling the utility company to account for its electricity rates. Protest against poverty and the recklessness of the coal industry in rural Ohio also drew upon these citizen-organizing tactics in the 1980s.

A second motivation for citizen-organizing is **self-determination**, the reclaiming of community identity among people whose culture has been marginalized. In the case of the *Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres* (OFIFC), an urgent response was needed to address the alienation of First Nations people as they moved off reserves into urban areas and to the fracturing of their culture by the colonial experience. The Friendship Centres have been physical and cultural spaces where people can reaffirm their cultural identity, find support from fellow Aboriginals, continue their healing journey, and then assert themselves and their identity in Canadian society as a whole. In the Inuit case *(A Quiet Movement*), the commonly-held assumption that the Inuit are good at "adapting" is challenged. While the recent formation of the territory of Nunavut (in 1999) means that Inuit have an opportunity for greater control over decision-making that affects their lives, achieving consensus across a vast territory of relatively isolated communities is a major challenge that has only recently been aided by new media. Impacted disproportionately by climate change, some have organized to affirm, in Sheila Watt-Cloutier's words "the right to be cold"[4]; while others try to find common cause in development that can honour culture while enabling a sustainable economy and provide a meaningful future for young people.

In North Carolina, Ammie Jenkins and the *Sandhills Family Heritage Association* have helped African American families organize to reclaim their cultural heritage. Forced to migrate to the cities during the "Jim Crow" period of legislated racial segregation, these families returned to restore landownership and small-scale agriculture and to re-establish themselves in a rural land-based economy. The organizing principle here was mutual solidarity in economic and social life as they researched and reclaimed their connection to the land, and asserted their right to defend it against encroachment by the Fort Bragg military base.

A third motivation for citizen-organizing is for the purpose of **community-building and civic engagement**. Invoking de Tocqueville's argument that associations are "schools for democracy", community building occurs through the strengthening of associational life and the consequent enrichment of trust, social togetherness, civic action and participation (Barber, 1984, Putnam, 2000). The approach takes as its starting point the existing associational base and the community assets that can be mobilized through those associations for a community purpose. It is through these actions that links between citizens are strengthened, making it easier to self-mobilize to achieve more strategic goals, whether social, political, or economic. An example in this collection of such community building is *Vivre St. Michel en Sante* (VSMS) in a suburb of Montreal where new immigrants from different cultures came together to address issues of common concern: transiency, poverty and crime. A series of roundtables resulted in actions to promote local revitalization, and this built the cohesion necessary for citizen action to protect their new identity: "Collaboration when possible, confrontation when necessary."

The story of *Rural Action* is another example of community building and civic engagement. In its early period it generated ideas and action for rural revitalization through an asset-based community development approach, building a community vision while identifying strengths, assets and shared history. At the same time, it built a membership base that linked people from diverse backgrounds, especially through church affiliation – a "congregational" style of organizing. More recently these ideas have folded into a systematic strategy for sustained wealth creation, focusing on sustainable agriculture, forestry, watershed restoration, environmental education, recycling and waste management. The solid membership base of the organization spreads and reinforces these ideas across the region and provides the capacity to forge coalitions and partnerships that pioneer and sustain a new economy.

The culturally diverse and historically neglected Diamond neighbourhoods of San Diego (*The Village at Market Creek*) is another example of building community, in this case with the assistance of an organizer hired by a funder to circulate through the community and begin looking for ways to "catalyze community change from within".[5] A team of community residents were enlisted to survey their neighbours to determine the community's priorities. Over 800 interviews were conducted, in four languages, and the information gathered became the basis for community discussions and a community vision for The Village at Market Creek. In this

[4] Watt-Cloutier, Sheila (March 2015).*The right to be cold: One woman's story of protecting her culture, the Arctic, and the whole planet*. Allen Lane Canada.

[5] J. Vanica, cited in Dewar, T. (forthcoming). *The Village at Market Creek*

way, the diverse assets of the community were harnessed into a vibrant economic venture, owned and managed by multi-ethnic low income community members themselves.

This example of ownership by low income shareholders illustrates a fourth motivation for citizen-organizing: **to pioneer a new economic model**. Pioneering a social economy in the case of New Dawn Enterprises in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia or the conservation economy in the case of *Ecotrust Canada* in British Columbia are additional examples. The *New Dawn Enterprises* case is an early example of organizing by a social entrepreneur to create awareness of new ways of promoting "an economy that serves society rather than the other way around". With historical roots in the cooperative movement, and responding to the loss of the single industry employer in the area, New Dawn tapped into innovative funding mechanisms for local investment in, and ownership of, enterprises that provided affordable housing, care for the elderly, and training for care workers. The organizing was done by people involved in social enterprises, steadily broadening networks with government and private sector partners as the enterprises forged the linkages required for a social economy to flourish.

Similarly, in British Columbia, citizens are organizing around social enterprises. In this case, the emphasis is on a triple bottom line or conservation economy, demonstrating the viability of small enterprises that are socially equitable, economically sound and environmentally sustainable. Like the *Rural Action, Deep South Wealth Creation Network, Sandhills Family Heritage Association*, and *New Dawn Enterprises* examples, these illustrate localized innovations or "mass localism" at its best.

All of these cases have grown organically from small local beginnings to a complex network of coalitions that enable local ideas to have traction at systemic levels. The art of coalition building, partnering with private and public sectors to create a regulatory environment that embeds mutualism, solidarity and equity together with market opportunities for local products and services is how citizen-led organizing evolved into multi-stakeholder "co-creation". The theme of coalition building and multi-stakeholder partnerships is elaborated in a separate thematic paper.

Challenges and opportunities

Many examples of civil society organizations that mediate between the citizens they serve or represent and other stakeholders, such as the private or public sector, are found in these case studies. However, without continued foundational work to stay connected at the base, some organizations may move ahead with an agenda that is fundable rather than the next step in a truly organic process. Citizen organizing may also come dangerously close to off-loading state responsibilities, hinted at in *VSMS* case, rather than finding innovative ways to partner with the state.

On the other hand, as original purposes for organizing merge with others, the initiatives featured in these cases have the potential to lead the way to organizing for a new economy and a new idea of the "public good". As these cases show, building multiple forms of wealth is required for a sustainable new economy. These include the stocks of social and intellectual capital built into relationships that arise through organizing for change, linking new ideas with the institutional capacity to bring them to fruition, in cultural and environmental assets, and in ownership and control of financial and other assets needed to build sustainable livelihoods. As these local organizing initiatives connect and learn from each other the articulation of a new type of economy becomes clearer.

Associated with the idea of a new economy is the premise that citizens have a role in helping to create a common or public good beyond the immediate responsibilities to community or neighbourhood, and beyond the responsibilities of the state. With this understanding, citizens organizing for a new economy will help to shape all types of institutions and associations so that they assume responsibility for the larger public goods that are reflected in multiple forms of wealth.

The challenge and the opportunity is that there is no one answer when it comes to citizen-driven change. The path is iterative, organic, complex, and dynamic. Luckily the starting point is relatively simple: coming together for a common cause.

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Questions for discussion:

1. Consider your own experience of citizens organizing for change. What was the motivation to organize? What was the role of citizens? What was the role of civil society organizations? Did the approach to organizing change over time?
2. What kind of leadership is necessary for the different approaches to citizen-organizing described in this paper?

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